

Review of Adam Ployd, *Augustine, the Trinity, and the Church: A Reading of the Anti-Donatist Sermons*. Oxford Studies in Historical Theology. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015. ISBN 978-0-19-021204-9. £47.99.

Readers familiar with Ployd's series of articles, the first of which appeared in *Augustinian Studies* in 2011, will recognise the author's research interest in Augustine's early tractates on the Gospel of John, and concurrently delivered *enarrationes* on the Psalms of Ascent (*Ps.* 120-134). In the present work, he appropriates the 'new canon' scholarship of Lewis Ayres, his doctoral project advisor, Michel René Barnes, Rowan Williams and Basil Studer, among others, applying their insights of the past two decades in the area of Augustine's theology of the Trinity. To the author's credit, it is apparently Ployd's own innovative and synthetic approach to Augustine, and Latin Christianity more generally, which allows for his key insight regarding 'pro-Nicene' Trinitarian thought and Augustine's anti-Donatist ecclesiology. That the two are intimately related is the main thesis of this book.

For source material, Ployd takes up the forty-one anti-Donatist sermons of Augustine, delivered *ca.* 406-407?—including the first sixteen tractates on John, the fifteen expositions on the Psalms of Ascent, and the ten meditations on the first letter of John. Yet in order to demonstrate Augustine's indebtedness to the Latin neo- and pro-Nicene traditions (a distinction that Ployd conveniently elides for present purposes), the author introduces a wealth of relevant citations from the earlier Nicones as well as the North African tradition stretching from Cyprian through the long fourth century of Donatism's rise and eventual condemnation at the Council of Carthage in 411. So while Ployd does not precisely attempt a retrieval of Donatist sources as Maureen Tilley has advocated, neither does he overlook the relevance of Augustine's own context. As a result, for example on the key issue of *potestas*, we see how Augustine was caught between a pre-existing tradition of North African baptismal theology and the emerging movement of Nicene Trinitarian 'orthodoxy'. One major finding of the present work—found in Chapter 4, "The Unity of Baptism"—is to suggest that Augustine opted primarily for the Trinitarian 'power' theology of operations, even in his view of baptismal efficacy against the Donatists, whose reliance upon Cyprian demarcated a separate view of *potestas* with its own, distinct lexical heritage.

Yet the Trinitarian depths Ployd wishes to explore are not limited to a simple transfer of the pro-Nicene understanding of shared operations (*sc.* 'powers'). Rather, the author wishes to develop a view of the temporal church on earth as somehow reflecting the unity of persons within the Trinity, such that the shared presence among human persons within the earthly church validates and confirms their necessary link to the divine life of the Trinity. Ployd thus shows how Augustine coordinates his separate commitment to Trinitarian principles with his anti-Donatist view of the church, which by nature excludes the notion of any unity-disrupting schism. The respective roles of the Holy Spirit, who binds together the people of God on earth through the unitive power of love, and of Christ the Son, who sends the Holy Spirit as the fruit of his communion with the Father, each receive due attention as Ployd's argument unfolds.

In Chapter 1, "To Know and To Love," Ployd discerns a certain form of 'moral epistemology' that readers must bear in mind when approaching the entire series of Augustine's anti-Donatist sermons selected for the present study. According to Ployd, this element is 'the key to [Augustine's] trinitarian thought' (19), yet the author wishes to extend the usefulness of both also for any reading of the anti-Donatist sermons. Drawing upon *de trinitate*, book 1, in particular and with insights from Michel Barnes, Ployd brings together Augustine's intellectual approach to *Phil.* 2:6-7 and his moral approach to *Matt.* 5:8 ('Blessed are the clean of heart for they shall see God.'). To summarise the author's conclusions, the people of God must approach the divine through the mystery of the Incarnation, by coming to know God by means of the Incarnate Christ, a process of reorientation away from the physical and material order, toward what is spiritual, good, eternal, true. The transformation of desire

and uplifting of the mind are thus continuous yet separate moments in the soul's journey to God, which, Ployd wishes to stress, takes place in the training ground of the body of Christ on earth, his Church.

In Chapter 2, "The Body of Christ," Ployd introduces the value of prosopological exegesis for Augustine in his anti-Donatist sermons, by means of which he was able to designate a single grammatical subject, 'Christ', to refer both to the eternal, Incarnate Son, and to the people of God on earth who make up his body. Here Ployd builds upon the *totus Christus* discourse that has been frequently studied, for example by Hubertus Drobner, Kimberly Baker and Michael Cameron, and demonstrates how Augustine makes use of this exegetical style against the Donatists. Finally, in Chapter 3, "The Love of the Holy Spirit," Ployd indicates the essential characteristics of the Spirit in the Church, and again makes use of the pro-Nicene lexicon to describe the '*proprium*' of the Spirit as uniting love. Here, especially with his use of *Rom.5:5*, Augustine confirms the earlier pneumatology of Ambrose, and Ployd dwells on this additional point of contact in order to solidify his argument.

For its essential insights, regarding the coordination on the part of Augustine of his pro-Nicene commitments and his anti-Donatist rhetoric, as well as the trinitarian 'moral epistemology' of reform and reorientation to our eternal good, and on the Church of Christ as the one vehicle by which we may cross the ocean of this world (*Io. eu. tr. 2.2*) – the last of which the Donatists upended, thus overturning the possibility of proper moral reform – Ployd's book is to be highly recommended. The work is rather compressed, as the author acknowledges, yet it addresses in an illuminating way this important phase of Augustine's career.

*Joseph Grabau*

*Catholic University of Louvain*